



# Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

## INSIDE

## No U.S. Desire to "Americanize" Somali Peace Process

By Stephen Kaufman  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — As press reports suggest a military offensive by the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) is under way against al-Shabab militants in Mogadishu, the top U.S. envoy to Africa says military operations are the responsibility of the TFG, and U.S. policy toward the war-torn country is guided by its support for the



*The U.S. supports Somalia's Transitional Federal Government, led by Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, but has no military role in the country.*

peace process.

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson told reporters in Washington March 12 that media accusations of U.S. military advisers in Somalia to aid the TFG are incorrect. Those allegations "do not reflect the accuracy of our policy," he said.

"We have provided limited military support to the Transitional Federal Government" through

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## U.S. Human Rights Report Has Far-Reaching Impact

By Jane Morse  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — The original purpose for the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices was to provide the U.S. Congress with information on countries to which the United States sends aid. "But it has become much bigger than that," according to Michael H. Posner.

"Today it is the single most comprehensive look at human rights around the world done by anyone," Posner, assistant secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, told America.gov in a recent interview. The report is "a baseline of information about what's going

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*Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, speaks at a U.N. Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva.*

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## U.S. Human Rights Report Has Far-Reaching Impact . . .

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on in human rights every year."

The Human Rights Report, its commonly used shortened title, covers internationally recognized civil, political and worker rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ( <http://www.america.gov/un-declaration.html> ). These rights include freedom from torture and other cruel treatment, freedom from prolonged detention without charge, and freedom from other flagrant violations of the rights to life, liberty and security.

This year the report has been expanded. More information will be reported on workers' rights, child soldiers, reproductive rights, practices that endanger indigenous people, and discrimination against homosexuals and victims of HIV/AIDS.

"Activists in many countries rely on the report," Posner said, "both because it gives them information they can't get from their own media, and also because as a product of the United States government it has some extra importance and power. And so we find that a lot of activists not only read the report, they circulate the report, they cite the report, and it gives them a sense of amplifying their own concerns [about human rights] and gives them some more authority in debating these issues within their own societies."

The report encourages governments to improve their human rights practices, according to Posner. He credits the findings of the annual reports for motivating the government of Zimbabwe to close in the mid-1980s at least one prison in which

prisoners suffered under horrible conditions. The U.S. Human Rights Report, Posner said, often draws attention to abuses that would otherwise go unnoticed on the world stage.

"And governments under the pressure of that kind of scrutiny decide to make changes," he said.

The Human Rights Report also plays a role in determining refugee status in immigration courts in the United States, Posner said. "It's not definitive, but it has been a central piece in making the claim that somebody is going to fear persecution being returned to their home country," Posner said. "So the report became an essential document in that quasi-judicial setting."

Since September 2009, Posner has been in charge of the State Department operation that collects, assembles and distributes human rights information on more than 190 governments. For many years he was a consumer and critic of the report — first as the executive director and then as the president of Human Rights First ( <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/> ), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, international human rights organization based in New York and Washington. In those capacities, he said, he spent many hours examining the methodology, findings and evolution of the report.

Mandated by the U.S. Congress in the mid-1970s, the report has steadily grown to include more comprehensive reviews on the practices of a greater number of governments on a greater range of human rights practices. "Now we have a really radically different product," Posner said. "It's thousands of pages long, and it reflects a much more sophisticated fact-gathering

approach both at the embassy level and here in Washington. So it really is quite an extraordinary document in terms of its comprehensiveness and detail."

Although most people might focus on the individual country reports themselves, Posner has been interested in the impact they've had on the people producing them. The Human Rights Report, Posner said, "has probably been the single most important educative tool for the [U.S.] Foreign Service."

"We've developed a culture where our diplomats are mandated by law to go out and meet human rights leaders and journalists and human rights activists and civil society — all sorts of people who are not traditionally at the center of what an embassy would be doing," Posner said. "And that has had an unbelievable impact in terms of the sensitivity of foreign service officers to what [human rights] is all about."

The goal of the U.S. Human Rights Report is to tell the truth, Posner said. "It is for sure going to make things more complicated for our diplomats around the world," Posner said. "We're going to have governments mad at them because we are telling the truth. But that gives the exercise integrity. And it's part of the way we are operating and have operated and will continue to operate. That discomfort is far outweighed in my mind by having accurate assessment of what's going on so that we can make intelligent policy decisions."

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## Women of Courage Honored at State Department

By Jane Morse  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — First lady Michelle Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton honored women human rights activists from around the world with this year's Women of Courage awards at a special ceremony March 10 at the State Department.

"These 10 women have overcome personal adversity, threats, arrest and assault to dedicate themselves to activism for human rights," said Melanne Vermeer, the State Department's first-ever ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, in introductory remarks. "From striving to give more voice to politically underrepresented women in Afghanistan to documenting human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, these heroic individuals have made it their life's work to increase freedom and equality in the world."

The awardees this year are Shukria Asil of Afghanistan, Colonel Shafiq Quraishi of Afghanistan, Androula Henriques of Cyprus, Sonia Pierre of the Dominican Republic, Shadi Sadr of Iran, Ann Njogu of Kenya, Dr. Lee Ae-ran of South Korea, Jan-sila Majeed of Sri Lanka, Sister Marie Claude Naddaf of Syria and Jestina Mukoko of Zimbabwe. The Women of Courage award was established in 2007 by then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to recognize and honor women around the globe who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in promoting women's rights and advancement.



*SECRETARY OF STATE Hillary Clinton (left) and First Lady Michelle Obama (right) present the 2010 International Women of Courage Award to Ann Njogu of Kenya in Washington March 10. Njogu helped pass Kenya's Sexual Offences Act, and she continues to expose corruption and advocate for women, even after enduring arrests and beatings.*

Clinton said the stories of this year's honorees are a reminder of how much work there is to do before human rights are respected and protected by all governments. She told the Women of Courage awardees: "We are standing with you. ... We here at the State Department and [the Obama] administration are trying to be good partners. ... We look forward to building relationships with you."

Clinton emphasized that the United States will be watchful of the awardees' safety. "We send a message to your governments, who may not be thrilled that you are here, that we will be watching them as well."

Michelle Obama lauded the awardees for taking risks and facing hardships few people are willing to endure. She noted that among the

women, "because if these women can endure relentless threats, then surely you can all keep going. ... None of you are too young to start making a difference." She urged the young American women to take inspiration from the Women of Courage awardees.

Speaking on behalf of all the awardees, Jestina Mukoko of Zimbabwe said the Women of Courage award is "a solidarity message that unites women all over the world. ... By accepting this award, we confirm that women have a place in the fight for equality and justice."

Also speaking at the awards ceremony was Andrea Jung, chairman and chief executive officer of Avon, a 125-year-old company that got its start by providing women with opportunities for economic independence through the sale of cosmetics.

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invited guests in the room were young women from a local school and from the White House mentoring program, which pairs young people from area high schools with White House staff mentors for a year.

"Listen closely," Obama told the young



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## For Human Rights Heroine, “No Ordinary Arrest”

By Carlyn Reichel  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — They came in the middle of the night asking for Jestina Mukoko. She did not even have time to put on her shoes and glasses before they seized and blindfolded her, taking her to an undisclosed location where the world would not know what happened to her for weeks.

“I knew that this was no ordinary arrest,” she said, “and I knew, as a human rights defender, that I thought I was being abducted. But I wasn’t sure if it was state security agents or ZANU-PF agents.”

ZANU-PF is the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front, at the time the country’s ruling political party.

It is a story that is all too familiar for human rights advocates around the world, but Mukoko would not disappear so easily. She fought the system of corruption and became an international symbol of the struggle for human rights in her home country of Zimbabwe. That is just one of the reasons U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and first lady Michelle Obama honored her as one of this year’s 10 International Women of Courage Award winners.

Mukoko’s calling to human rights work began after the outbreak of violence following the 2002 elections in Zimbabwe. As a longtime

television and radio journalist, she was interviewing women who had suffered violence and, for the first time in her career, she was unable to finish the interviews. “I felt emotionally drained, and physically I just could not look at these women and imagine what they went through.” Since then, Mukoko has worked

Earlier in the week, she explained that in Zimbabwe, “if you are a human rights activist, you are labeled a puppet of the West; you are labeled a member of the then-opposition, the MDC [Movement for Democratic Change]. You are also immediately an enemy of the state.”



*U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama present the 2010 International Women of Courage Award to Jestina Mukoko of Zimbabwe.*

tirelessly, often in the face of great personal danger, to document politically motivated human rights violations as executive director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project.

As Mukoko noted March 10 during the International Women of Courage Awards ceremony ( <http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2010/March/20100310183601ajesrom0.3007733.html> ) at the U.S. State Department, the life and work of human rights defenders around the world is not for the faint-hearted.

That much is evidenced by Mukoko’s personal ordeal. For three weeks after her abduction in December 2008, Mukoko was imprisoned, tortured, cut off from all outside communication and forced to confess to crimes against the state. At times, Mukoko’s abductors forced her to kneel on gravel; at others, they lashed the soles of her feet. Occasionally, the pain was so intense, she felt as if she had left her body.

When international political pressure finally brought about her release on bail, Mukoko faced charges of attempting to overthrow a constitutionally elected government. “But at the time that I was being accused of this, there was no constitutionally elected government in

Zimbabwe. We were awaiting results of an election that had been conducted in March, and the results of which were withheld for five weeks.”

Mukoko took her fight all the way through the justice system to the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe, where she won. The court unanimously agreed that her rights had been violated, but in retrospect, Mukoko realizes how lucky she was. “I had a profile, and I had made contacts with people in a

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## Clinton Calls for a Renewed Commitment to Advance Women's Rights

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called for a renewal of the global commitment to advance women's rights spurred by the U.N. World Conference on Women 15 years ago in Beijing, saying that women's progress is progress for human rights.

Clinton, speaking at U.N. headquarters, praised efforts to improve the status of women and girls across the globe, saying much progress has been made.

"Fifteen years ago, delegates from 189 countries met in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women," Clinton said. "It was a call to action, a call to the global community to work for the laws, reforms and social changes necessary to ensure that women and girls everywhere finally have the opportunities they deserve to fulfill their own God-given potentials and contribute fully to the progress and prosperity of their societies."

But she warned that the progress achieved so far is not the end, but only the beginning of the work to realize the dreams set down in Beijing. Clinton spoke at the conference in 1995 as the first lady when her husband Bill Clinton was president.

"Women are still the majority of the world's poor, the uneducated, the unhealthy, [and] the unfed," she added.

Improving the status of women,

Clinton told delegates March 12 in New York, is a political, economic and social imperative. The paradox facing many women is they are the majority of the world's farmers, but



*Secretary Clinton, left, with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon March 12 at U.N. Headquarters in New York for the Conference on Women.*

often are forbidden to own the land they farm.

"President Obama and I believe that the subjugation of women is a threat to the national security of the United States," Clinton said. "It is also a threat to the common security of our world because the suffering and denial of the rights of women and the instability of nations go hand in hand."

Clinton reminded delegates, in her address to the Commission on the Status of Women's 54th session, that achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is the third of eight Millennium Development Goals, the anti-poverty targets world leaders have pledged to attain by 2015.

Development strategies must reflect the roles for women in society and the benefits they bring, Clinton

said. She cited three major U.S. foreign policy initiatives to illustrate the American commitment:

The Global Health Initiative, a \$63 billion commitment to improve health and strengthen health systems worldwide.

The U.S. global food security program, which is a \$3.5 billion commitment to strengthen the world's food supply so farmers can earn enough to support their families and food can be available more broadly.

The U.S. response to the challenge of climate change. In Copenhagen in December 2009, Clinton announced that the United States would work with other countries to mobilize \$100 billion a year, by 2020, to address the climate needs of developing countries.

### BAN CALLS FOR END TO GENDER VIOLENCE

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon earlier called on the international community to urgently join forces to end one of the most brutal and entrenched forms of gender discrimination — violence against women.

"We all need to unite to demand accountability for the violations of rights of women and girls," he said. "We must listen to and support the victims and, importantly, address the roots of violence by changing the mindsets that perpetuated it."

Sexual abuse during conflict is just one of many ways women and girls

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## No U.S. Desire to “Americanize” Somali Peace Process . . .

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the Africa Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Carson said. “We have supported the acquisition of nonlethal equipment to the governments of Burundi and to Uganda in particular,” as well as Djibouti, ranging from communications equipment and uniforms to transportation and support for Ugandan military training of TFG forces.

Carson estimated that U.S. support for AMISOM over the past 18 or 19 months has been “in the neighborhood of \$185 million.”

The assistant secretary said he wanted to “set the record straight and place our policy in proper context.” U.S. policy is “guided by our support of the Djibouti peace proc-

ess ( <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/June/20080610145023xjsnommis0.9504511.html> ),” he said.

“The United States does not plan, does not direct, and it does not coordinate the military operations of the TFG, and we have not and will not be providing direct support for any potential military offensives. Further, we are not providing nor paying for military advisers for the TFG. There is no desire to Americanize the conflict in Somalia,” Carson said.

The United States believes the TFG seeks to end the violence caused by al-Shabab and other extremist groups and calls for “an inclusive political solution” to resolve the conflict, urging Somalis to reject

violence and “participate in the hard work of stabilizing the country” that will benefit the whole population, he said.

“The Somali people have suffered tremendously throughout more than 20 years of conflict, and Somalia’s turmoil destabilizes not only that country, but the region and also some aspects of the international community,” Carson said.

But this “is not an American problem,” he said. Somalis and Africans should “remain in the lead.”

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## Women of Courage Honored at State Department . . .

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Jung announced that the Avon Foundation for Women is presenting a \$500,000 grant to the U.S. Department of State Secretary’s Fund for Global Women’s Leadership for programs designed to help end violence against women.

Jung also said the foundation is donating another \$1.2 million to Vital Voices, a nongovernmental organization aimed at training women the world over for leadership. That grant will bring together women leaders from 15 countries to share insights in furthering the progress of women in fields such as business, government and law enforcement.

A video replay of the awards ceremony is available at <http://www.state.gov/video/>.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## Clinton Calls for a Renewed Commitment to Advance . . .

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are brutalized and denied their fundamental rights, he said. Whether domestic violence, sex trafficking or so-called honor crimes, violence against women and girls is horrific and it devastates individuals and societies alike.

Since adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, international and regional human rights treaties, as well as United Nations resolutions had obliged nations to eliminate violence against women. The U.N. Security Council had adopted resolution 1325 in 2000 on women, peace and security, while other texts had established that sexual violence in conflict could be prosecuted as war crimes, crimes against humanity or acts of genocide.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*



## U.S. Treasury Opens Internet Exports to Iran, Sudan, Cuba

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — The U.S. Treasury Department is permitting technology companies to export online services such as instant messaging, e-mail and Web browsing to Iran, Sudan and Cuba to help people communicate through the Internet and social networks.

The Treasury Department on March 8 announced the changes that allow general licenses to export personal Internet communications services. The changes also permit exporting software to Iran and Sudan, but similar export licensing for Cuba is controlled by the U.S. Commerce Department. Previously, digital technology companies were reluctant to export personal communications services to those countries because of federal export restrictions.

"Consistent with the administration's deep commitment to the universal rights of all the world's citizens, the issuance of these general licenses will make it easier for individuals in Iran, Sudan and Cuba to use the Internet to communicate with each other and with the outside world," Deputy Treasury Secretary Neal Wolin said in the announcement.

"Today's actions will enable Iranian, Sudanese and Cuban citizens to exercise their most basic rights," he added.

The action was first recommended in December 2009 when the State Department submitted to Congress notification of a national interest waiver under federal law that would permit exporting free mass-market software to Iran. The software was

necessary for the exchange and sharing of personal communications over the Internet. Treasury announced amendments to sanctions regulations that would permit issuing export licenses for the three countries. The changes do not affect restrictions on North Korea and Syria.

a basic human right — for all Iranians."

But Wolin cautioned that the United States will continue to aggressively enforce existing sanctions and will work with international partners to increase pressure on the Iranian regime to meet international obligations. That is a specific reference to



*Young people often use cell phones to send text messages as a part of social networking.*

The waiver does not apply to encryption and other software that would permit tracking of an individual's personal Internet activity, according to Treasury officials. Both President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton have said access to Internet communications is a basic goal of U.S. foreign policy.

"As recent events in Iran have shown, personal Internet-based communications like e-mail, instant messaging and social networking are powerful tools," Wolin said.

"This software will foster and support the free flow of information —

efforts by the United States and other Western nations to convince Iranian leaders to forgo development of nuclear weapons. The United States and others are seeking a new set of sanctions against Iran if its leaders do not end uranium enrichment, considered an essential component in making a nuclear weapon.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

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## Technology Helps, Hurts Human Rights Activists, Report Says

By Jane Morse  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — New technologies help human rights proponents get their message out, but repressive governments are using them as well to muzzle activists, according to the latest County Reports on Human Rights Practices.

"New technologies have proven useful both to oppressors and to those who struggle to expose the failures and the cowardice of the oppressors," said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at a March 11 press briefing for the release of the 2010 report.

A major trend identified in the report, according to Michael Posner, assistant secretary for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, is that human rights activists are increasingly using new communications media, including the Internet and telephone text messaging, to reach a broader audience. But governments, he said, "are also very aware of the power of these new media and are trying to control it and control those using it in ways that are really troubling and also invading personal privacy."

The Human Rights Report — its commonly used shortened title — covers internationally recognized civil, political and worker rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ( <http://www.america.gov/un-declaration.html> ). These rights include freedom from torture and other cruel treatment, freedom from prolonged detention without charge, and freedom from other flagrant violations of the rights to life, liberty and security.

This year, the report has been expanded. More information is being reported on workers' rights, child soldiers, reproductive rights, practices that endanger indigenous people and discrimination against homosexuals and victims of HIV/AIDS.

Clinton called the annual report "an essential tool" for human rights activists, journalists, scholars and governments. But she noted that the individual country reports are not intended to prescribe policy; they provide essential data. "I view these reports not as ends in themselves, but as an important tool in the development of practical and effective human rights strategies by the United States government," Clinton said.

This year's reports assess the human rights practices of 194 governments worldwide. Posner identified several disturbing trends.

"One is that increasingly, governments are becoming more restrictive in their tolerance of nongovernmental human rights organizations," he said. "They're trying to constrain their ability to register and to operate. They're trying to constrain their ability to receive foreign funding. And that's a trend that we see dramatically in the last several years. At least 25 governments have enacted new laws or regulations that restrict that."

Posner also said "a number of human rights violations are carried out both by governments and by armed groups opposing them." He added: "Governments misuse or overuse concepts of national security to impose Draconian restrictions on people, but at the same time, those

national security emergencies are real in many places."

Many vulnerable groups — such as refugees and displaced people — are victims of human rights violations, Posner said. The challenge of the U.S. government "is to both highlight what happens to those vulnerable groups, but more importantly, to try to figure out what we can do to protect them."

Posner said China's poor human rights record is getting worse in some areas, such as the increased cultural and religious repression of ethnic minorities. Iran's already poor human rights record, he said, got worse after the June elections — at least 45 people were killed in government-protestor clashes. And Cuba's treatment of prisoners is "deplorable," he said.

But there are also positive trends. Posner cited President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's successful efforts in Liberia to complete a major truth-and-reconciliation commission report. Georgia passed criminal-procedure legislation that provides greater protections in trials. Ukraine established a commission on corruption and had a successful election. And Bhutan transitioned to a constitutional system and a parliamentary monarchy following the king's voluntary relinquishment of his authority.

But Posner — who served a number of years as the executive director and then president of Human Rights First, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, international human rights organization — said the most important positive trend was the increase in activity and creativity among human rights activists. ♦



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## Spearheading a Grass-Roots Movement for Change in Kenya

By Carlyn Reichel  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — There were three times Ann Njogu considered quitting her work in human rights activism in Kenya. The first was when a woman walked into her office so badly beaten by her husband that her head and face were swollen to the size of a huge pumpkin. Njogu and her organization successfully had the husband arrested, only to have the woman's mother drop the charges when the community threatened to burn down the mother's house in retribution.

The second instance followed a visit to the Lang'ata women's prison, where Njogu interviewed hundreds of women who were wrongfully imprisoned and held for years without access to the justice system. "If truly we are working in this area," Njogu thought, "how can there be so many innocent women in the custody of the jails?"

The third came after hearing from the young women on her staff of the kind of mental trauma they had suffered seeing the daily abuse and violence perpetrated against women in their country. On each occasion, though, it was precisely because of these women that Njogu continued her work, and it was on behalf of all their struggles that Njogu recently accepted a 2010 Women of Courage Award from U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and first lady Michelle Obama.

As chairperson of the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness, Njogu documents gender-based violence and advocates constitutional reforms to enshrine equal rights for

every Kenyan, regardless of gender, class or ethnic background. She is a woman actively working to put herself out of business. "A new constitutional dispensation ... would en-



*Human rights lawyer Ann Njogu does not shy away from controversy. Her fighting spirit keeps her fighting until she achieves results.*

sure that nobody is left out, nobody is excluded, that nobody is lesser or greater," she said. "Once we get a new constitutional dispensation, most of the women's issues that we deal with will also fall by the wayside, because it will be entrenched in the supreme law of the land."

As part of this effort, Njogu's other organization, Africa Community Development Media, is committed to spreading community-based radio stations to each of the 210 parliamentary constituencies in Kenya so communities can generate their own media and determine the issues that are important to them. "Unless the people are equipped with all the information they require, and they need, to make the

right decisions," said Njogu, "they'll never be able to shake off the shackles of oppression."

Like many other human rights advocates around the world, Njogu has paid a high price for her activism. She has been harassed and arrested, including in 2008 when she was sexually molested by the police who were beating and arresting her. Though she had worked in the field of sexual violence for years and seen countless travesties, Njogu's reaction was no different from that of any other woman in that situation: "I wanted to die. For three months, I cried every day."

Njogu picked right back up with her work. She is quick to point out, however, that it is not that she or any of her colleagues lack fear, "we still felt the fear, but continued to do it anyway because it was the right thing. We understand that it is our duty, and that of our generation, to replace the present despair with a new hope."

Despite everything she has been through, that hopefulness is one of the most striking qualities about Njogu. "In Africa and in Kenya we have all the resources," she says. "It's only that we have the wrong priorities, the wrong leadership to direct those priorities, and the levels of corruption that make it impossible for that potential to be realized." She often speaks excitedly about a new generation of Kenyan leaders committed to ethics, merit, service and accountability striving to bring about national transformation and not "sedation through welfare."

She also highlights the importance

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## For Human Rights Heroine, “No Ordinary Arrest” . . .

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number of countries. But as a human rights activist, I said to myself, there is no way that I can quit and play into the hands of ZANU-PF and allow the thousands of women who fall into the same predicament as me to suffer.”

Despite her experience of political corruption, Mukoko remains a staunch advocate for working toward a new constitution so the people of Zimbabwe can determine how they are governed as a nation. She cautions, though, that even the most brilliant constitution “will just be a document.” “The challenge remains with the citizens in terms of demanding to see that document

implemented,” and knowing what their rights are under the constitution.

She also fears that any planned constitutional referendum and elections will be subject to the same violence and intimidation tactics that have plagued past elections. The Zimbabwe Peace Project is already hearing threats of “unspecified action” against those who do not support the Kariba draft of the constitution. As part of her time in Washington, Mukoko asked for international support and legal resources to help when violence erupts, particularly help for the women who often bear the brunt of such outbreaks. She also asked for support for civil society organiza-

tions in Zimbabwe because “our space as human rights defenders is shrinking by the day.”

Despite the abuses she has suffered, Jestina Mukoko has no intention of backing down or disappearing again. She knows that her work, and that of women and human rights defenders like her, sends the right message to people in power. “It is important that people do not give up,” she says, “because this is really the future for our children. If we give up, then we have given up on the next generation.”

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

## Spearheading a Grass-Roots Movement for Change in Kenya. . .

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of continued international attention to issues in her country. In response to a question about how American women and organizations could provide support for her work, Njogu replied: “When you speak up, our government listens. When you activate your networks, that is awesome.” As one example, she credits the letters written on her behalf from all over the world as instrumental in securing her release from prison.

“We hear the voices from across the world telling us, yes it has been done elsewhere — it can also be done in Kenya,” says Njogu. “Those voices make us ask, if it has happened elsewhere, why can’t it happen in Kenya? Why can’t it happen in Africa?” Njogu believes it can and will.

At her core, Njogu has faith that individual efforts and individual choices made at the grass-roots level will transform Kenyan society and mitigate the entrenched inequalities; that information generated

through community-owned and -operated radio outlets will empower people to make the best decisions for their communities; that informed citizens will elect leaders who stand for good governance and condemn corruption. “The time for change has come,” Njogu states confidently, “and there’s nobody that’s going to stop that kind of change that is brewing across the country.”

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

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## African Stars, Stories Honored at the Oscars

By Gabrielle M. M. Brock  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — This year, the 82nd annual Academy Awards ceremony, known as the Oscars, reflected the growing influence of African artists — and issues — on the American movie industry.

For the first time, a film written and directed by an African was nominated for Best Picture. District 9, written and directed by Neill Blomkamp of South Africa, and set in modern-day Johannesburg, offers a bleak imagining of the social consequences of extraterrestrials landing on Earth. The film's principal themes of xenophobia, racial segregation and forced evictions, as well its title, are deeply rooted in the history of apartheid in South Africa. Shooting on location in Chiawelo, Soweto, the cast and crew of District 9 were overwhelmingly South African, and all but unknown to American audiences.

District 9 enjoyed a resounding and immediate success in the United States, opening as the Number 1 box office hit during the weekend of August 14, 2009. The science-fiction movie became a surprise hit with moviegoers and critics alike. Rotten Tomatoes, a U.S. online aggregator of film critiques and ratings, described the film as "technically brilliant and emotionally wrenching," and reported that it got 90 percent positive reviews.

Though District 9 did not win any of the four Oscars for which it was nominated, it received kudos from the critics.

The film Tsotsi by South African

Gavin Hood picked up the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Picture in 2005, and District 9's 2010 success indicates that the South African movie industry is



*Music for Prudence director Roger Ross Williams and Prudence Mabhena.*

making an impressive impact on Hollywood.

In the documentary category, Music by Prudence, a film about a young Zimbabwean singer whose voice could not be silenced by abandonment, abuse or abject poverty, picked up the award for Best Documentary Short (short film). Director Roger Ross Williams, an African-American from a Gullah community in South Carolina, learned about Prudence Mabhena from his producer, Elinor Burkett. He flew out to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and spent two weeks with Prudence at King George VI, a school providing reha-

bilitation, boarding and education to children with physical disabilities and hearing impairments — the only one of its kind in Zimbabwe. He then returned to the United States

to raise funds to shoot the documentary he knew he had to make about Prudence and Liyana, her band of fellow disabled musicians.

Prudence's story is one of courage, hope and exceptional music. Music by Prudence will be on television in the United States in May, and will be shown at film festivals all over the country.

In addition to African stories, African actors were also in the spotlight this year. Nominated for Best Performance in a Lead Role, Gabourey Sidibe, whose father is from Senegal, earned praise for a breakthrough performance in the movie Precious: Based on the Novel "Push" by Sapphire. Playing an obese, illiterate, abused and pregnant teenager, 26-year-old Sidibe was hired after only one

audition with the film's director. Though she did not come home with the Oscar, her performance earned critics' praise. During the Oscar ceremony, Precious co-producer Oprah Winfrey, known for her efforts to support female education in Africa, paid tribute to Sidibe, saying that the young Senegalese-American was "on the threshold of a brilliant new career."

Finally, Invictus, a highly acclaimed American film about a historic moment in African history, garnered two Academy Award nominations, for Best Actor in a Lead and Best

*(Continued on page 12)*



## African Stars, Stories Honored at the Oscars . . .

(Continued from page 11)

Actor in a Supporting Role. Filmed in Cape Town, South Africa, *Invictus* stars Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela and focuses on Mandela's early presidency and his efforts to unite the country around its mostly white rugby team in the aftermath of the abolition of apartheid. Matt Damon plays François Pienaar, the Afrikaner team captain.

Though neither actor took home the Oscar, Freeman's and Damon's performances brought a pivotal moment in South African history alive for viewers. Freeman attended the ceremony wearing a bracelet created by the Nelson Mandela Foundation ( <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php> ) as part of the 46664 Campaign. Named after the five-digit prisoner number assigned to Mandela for nearly 30 years, the campaign uses that number as a symbol for the faith that hard work and compassion can build a brighter and fairer world. The bracelets are to be auctioned off later this year, with the proceeds going to the foundation.

*Invictus* is not the only Africa-related film in recent years to be recognized by the Academy. Over the years, dozens of films about Africa have been nominated for Academy Awards. Starting with 1985's *Out of Africa*, which won Best Picture, Hollywood began taking note of African stories and projecting them onto the silver screen, much to the delight of American critics and filmgoers:

In 1987, Denzel Washington was nominated for his performance as South African human rights leader Steve Biko in *Cry Freedom*.



*Precious co-producer Oprah Winfrey and star Gabourey Sidibe.*

In 1989, Marlon Brando was nominated for his role in *A Dry White Season*, a film about apartheid in South Africa.

1997 was a big year for Africa at the Oscars. Steven Spielberg retold the story of the slaves kidnapped by the crew of the slave ship *Amistad* and garnered four nominations. *The Ghost and the Darkness*, a thriller about the building of the railway in colonial Kenya, won an award for sound editing. That year, the Best Documentary award went to *When We Were Kings*, a recounting of the famous "Rumble in the Jungle" — the 1974 boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman held in Zaire. Another Best Documentary nominee was *Mandela: Son of Africa, Father of a Nation*.

In 1998, *Gorillas in the Mist*, about Dian Fossey's struggle to protect mountain gorillas in Rwanda, earned five nominations.

In 2001, the Academy gave the Best Foreign Language Picture

award to *Nowhere in Africa*, a German film about a German Jewish family fleeing to Kenya during the 1930s.

In 2004, *Hotel Rwanda*, about the Rwandan genocide, received three nominations.

In 2005, *The Constant Gardener*, a thriller set in present-day Kenya, was nominated for four Academy Awards, and *Tsotsi*, a depiction of life in the townships in Johannesburg, won Best Foreign Language Picture.

In 2006, Forest Whitaker won Best Actor for his performance as Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland*. The same year, *Blood Diamond*, a film about the conflict diamond industry and the civil war in Sierra Leone, received five nominations.

In 2008, *War Dance*, a documentary about children living in a refugee camp in Uganda, was nominated for Best Documentary. ♦

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## U.S. Senate Passes Bill Against African Rebel Group's Atrocities

By Jim Fisher-Thompson  
Staff Writer

**Washington** — The U.S. Senate has passed a bill with wide bipartisan support aimed at curbing atrocities in Uganda and Sudan committed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a vicious rebel group that has terrorized eastern Africa for more than two decades and whose depredations are spreading to Africa's Great Lakes region.

The Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, sponsored by senators Russ Feingold (Democrat from Washington), Sam Brownback (Republican from Kansas) and James Inhofe (Republican from Oklahoma) and cosponsored by 60 other senators, was approved by the Senate March 11. Feingold, who long has been an advocate for democracy and development in Africa, is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa.

To become law, the bill must be passed by the House of Representatives and signed by the president.

It would require the U.S. government to work with multilateral partners "to develop a viable path to disarm the LRA, while ensuring the protection of civilians," according to a statement from Feingold.

In the statement, Feingold said, "When I traveled to northern Uganda, I saw the effects of the LRA's brutality in the faces of the Ugandan people living in displacement camps. The passage of this

bill sends a message that the United States will no longer stand by and watch the Lord's Resistance Army terrorize innocent civilians across central Africa, kidnap thousands of children and force them to become child soldiers."

He added, "This legislation also sends a clear signal that the United States is committed to working with regional stakeholders to change the conditions that have allowed this war to persist for so long."

Over more than two decades, the LRA, under the brutal leadership of Joseph Kony, has kidnapped more than 66,000 children and forced them to fight as child soldiers, Feingold said. The group's attacks have spread to northeastern Congo and the Central African Republic. In 2009 the United Nations reported that the LRA killed more than 1,500 people, abducted more than 1,800, and displaced hundreds of thousands of people in the Central African Republic, Congo and southern Sudan.

The legislation authorizes U.S. assistance for transitional justice and reconciliation to help the Ugandan government address the grievances and regional divisions that the LRA exploited for nearly two decades. The act calls for an additional \$10 million in humanitarian assistance for those areas outside of Uganda now directly affected by the LRA's brutality.

Brownback, a promoter of anti-malaria programs in Africa, said when he visited Uganda in 2004, "I

learned firsthand about the atrocities against civilians committed by the LRA. The United States and the international community must work to establish lasting peace in northern Uganda and to bring Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army to justice."



*Maurice Otto, 13, was mutilated in 2001 when the Lord's Resistance Army attacked his home in northern Uganda.*

He added, "I am thankful that my Senate colleagues passed this important piece of legislation, and look forward to the bill being signed into law."

Inhofe said, "I am pleased that we were finally able to find a way forward for this legislation, because quite frankly, it is just too important to hold up. Today's Senate passage of this bill is a victory for the countless lives destroyed at the hands of Joseph Kony."

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*

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## Israeli Settlement Announcement “An Insult,” Clinton Says

**By Stephen Kaufman**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** — Obama administration officials continue to criticize Israeli settlement expansion following the March 9 announcement of 1,600 new units in East Jerusalem, saying bilateral ties remain strong but that Israel and the Palestinians need to take measures to build up confidence and trust that will help advance peace efforts.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a March 12 interview with NBC television, described the Israeli announcement, made during Vice President Biden’s trip to the region ( <http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2010/March/20100312145414esnamfua0.5018732.html> ), as “an insult” both to the vice president and to the United States.

“We share common values and there is so much that Israel represents that we support,” Clinton said. “But we believe in the two-state solution” that establishes a viable, contiguous and independent Palestinian state and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also said he believes in. The Obama administration wants to see “confidence-building measures and actions that will result in the resumption of negotiations and then a move toward the resolution on the final status issues,” she said.

“The United States is deeply invested in trying to work with the parties in order to bring about this

resolution,” she said. “We don’t get easily discouraged, so ... we’re working toward the resumption of the negotiation. But we expect Israel and the Palestinians to do their part, and not to take any action that will undermine the chance that we can achieve the two state solution,” she said.

The secretary acknowledged on CNN television March 12 that there are those on both sides as well as “outside agitators” who are not in favor of a two-state solution or a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Both sides had agreed to hold indirect talks on March 8. Clinton said the resumption of talks “is the most important goal,” and that the Obama administration wants “the difficult negotiations that will lead to the two-state solution” to proceed.

In a joint statement March 12 ( <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/March/20100312172455eaifas0.1906353.html> ), the United Nations, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States, collectively known as the Middle East Quartet, also condemned Israel’s announcement of new settlements and agreed to “closely monitor developments in Jerusalem” and consider additional steps to address the situation on the ground.

“The Quartet will take full stock of the situation at its meeting in Moscow on March 19,” the statement said.

All four reaffirmed that “unilateral actions taken by either party cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community,” and that peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, including the establishment of a Palestinian state “is in the fundamental interests of the parties, of all states in the region, and of the international community.”

Senior White House adviser David Axelrod told ABC television March 14 that the Israeli announcement “seemed calculated to undermine” the recently announced proximity talks, which he said was “distressing” to those who are promoting peace in the region.

The conflict serves as a flash point throughout the region, and it is important not only to the security of Israelis and Palestinians, but also the United States “that we move forward and resolve this very difficult issue,” Axelrod said.

*(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦*



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## Northern Ireland Offers Perspective for Mideast Peace Efforts

**By Stephen Kaufman**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States is seeking the “full commitment” of Israelis and Palestinians to peace efforts, and visiting Irish Foreign Minister Michael Martin said the developing peace process in Northern Ireland offers the two sides a “useful template” for conflict resolution.

In remarks at the State Department March 16, Clinton praised the March 9 vote by the Northern Ireland Assembly to complete the process — know as devolution — of transferring police and judicial powers from the British Parliament.

The vote marked “an important step toward realizing the promise of the Good Friday Agreement and the St. Andrews Agreement and achieving a full and lasting peace for the people of Northern Ireland,” Clinton said. The Obama administration, through its economic envoy, Declan Kelly, has been actively working with Northern Irish leaders to build on their agreements and promote peace through private-sector investment.

Martin said reconciliation between the communities in Northern Ireland remains a “key priority,” and there is still work needed to extend the economic benefits brought by the peace process to harder-to-reach communities in the area. “I’m talking about areas where the health indices are not what they should be, where school-completion rates may not be what they should be,” he said.

But, in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Martin said one

important lesson from Northern Ireland’s experience is that “where there is a political will on behalf of all parties to a conflict or to a dispute, there can be resolution, and the prospects ... for resolution can be good.”

It has taken more than 20 years for the Northern Ireland process to arrive where it is today, and “it still needs a lot of attention, focus and application,” he said.

But the experience provides “a useful template to look at in terms of how you bring people into a process that ultimately leads to a resolution,” Martin said, stressing the need for moderate voices to be encouraged.

The foreign minister welcomed the U.S. push for indirect, or proximity, talks between Israelis and Palestinians and cited Special Envoy George Mitchell’s “valuable role” in encouraging the peace process in Northern Ireland during the 1990s. “We know his patience, his legendary patience, and his patience in situations like this,” he said. Mitchell was appointed special envoy for Mideast peace in January 2009.

Secretary Clinton said that in the aftermath of Israel’s announcement of new settlements in East Jerusalem, the United States is actively consulting with Israel “over steps that we think would demonstrate the requisite commitment” to the peace process.

The Obama administration is committed to a negotiated two-state solution, Clinton said. “We think that George Mitchell’s legendary patience will win the day as the process gets started again because there’s just too much at stake for

both the Palestinians and the Israelis,” the secretary added.

Asked about the role of Hamas, which the United States has designated as a terrorist organization, Clinton said the group is aware of the conditions it needs to meet in order to participate in peace efforts.

“If Hamas renounces violence, recognizes Israel’s right to exist, pursues a responsible political path, they would certainly be recognized as having a role to play. But in the absence of that, you cannot have an armed resistance group that continues to call for the elimination of Israel as part of a peace process,” she said. “It’s a contradiction.”

Foreign Minister Martin likened the situation to the participation of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), in the Northern Ireland peace process.

“The fundamental trigger for the engagement back a long time ago was the renunciation of violence, a cease-fire that the IRA declared to facilitate engagement and participation in the overall process,” Martin said.

In Ireland’s approach to the Middle East, “we’ve consistently made it clear publicly that there has to be a renunciation of violence, and there has to be a recognition ... of Israel,” he said.

Secretary Clinton also welcomed Ireland’s decision to devote 20 percent of its international assistance budget to help alleviate global hunger. Ireland is already targeting maternal and infant malnutrition in countries such as Malawi, Ethiopia and Tanzania, she said. ♦

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## Muslim and Arab Americans Learn Importance of Being Counted

**By M. Scott Bortot**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** — The U.S. Constitution requires that a census be taken of the American people every 10 years. The purpose? To determine the number of representatives in the U.S. Congress and to allocate federal funds appropriate to the needs of communities.

This month, the U.S. Census Bureau is sending questionnaires to millions of homes. Each form asks 10 questions designed to understand who lives in each household. As with previous censuses, questions on the 2010 U.S. Census form are sparking debate among Americans.

Like many of their fellow citizens, Muslim and Arab Americans have concerns about the census. How will their information be used? Who will be able to use their information?

To make their concerns known, and to answer questions in an open forum, Muslim and Arab-American organizations are partnering with the U.S. Census Bureau nationwide to urge their communities to participate in the census. Events are being held all over the United States where representatives of the Census Bureau meet with different communities and answer their questions.

One of these events was held March 8 in Washington, where Muslim Americans asked questions and voiced their opinions about the 2010 census with Census Bureau officials and community leaders. Sponsored by the American Muslim Interactive Network (AMIN) in partnership with the U.S. Census Bu-

reau, the "U.S. Census 2010: Muslim Voices Matter" event featured a panel discussion and question-and-answer session.

Held at the Rafik B. Hariri Building at Georgetown University, the panel included U.S. Census Center Assis-



*Imam Johari Abdul-Malik encourages Muslim Americans to participate in the U.S. Census.*

stant Manager Philip Lutz, Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center community outreach director Imam Johari Abdul-Malik and DC Counts Director Maurice Henderson from the office of Washington's mayor. Lutz addressed a concern shared by Americans of all backgrounds — the confidentiality of the census.

"There is a fear that filling out a census form will lead to something bad," Lutz told the audience, but stressed this is not true. "The census is used only for statistical purposes and it cannot be used with any other federal agencies." Fliers distributed to audience members by the Census Bureau read "Keeping your answers confidential is our solemn oath."

Lutz said personal information gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau cannot be shared with government agencies. Even federal law enforcement agencies are prohibited from accessing personal data.

During the question-and-answer session, audience members asked about census confidentiality. Could new laws make personal data available to the federal government?

Alejandro Beutel, the Muslim Public Affairs Council government affairs liaison, said that America's legislative process is shaped by its citizens through engagement with elected officials. If people disagree with legislation — enacted or proposed — they have the power to change it.

Another issue for some Americans is how they define their race on the census form. One of the questions asks about the race of household members, but currently "Arab" is not given as an option. Many Arab Americans feel their ethnicity should be one of the choices on the census forms. Therefore, many Arab Americans are mobilizing their communities to check the "Some other race" box on census forms and write in "Arab."

Beutel highlighted the Samoan-American community as an example of how to be counted. Although they number approximately 60,000 nationwide, Samoans worked hard to be represented on census forms, according to Beutel.

"Contact your local government representative and lobby for your ethnicity to be placed on the cen-

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## U.S. Geological Survey to Help Devise Climate Adaptation Projects

**By Karin Rives**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** — The U.S. Geological Survey ( [http://www.usgs.gov/global\\_change](http://www.usgs.gov/global_change) ) (USGS) has unique knowledge of how rising global temperatures are affecting America's natural resources. Lately, USGS scientists have been tapped to also help devise strategies that will help nature adapt to climate change.

A number of USGS climate adaptation projects aimed at protecting the nation's natural resources against ecological havoc are under way — and efforts to boost funding for such work is an indication of how significant this new mandate has become.

President Obama asked for an \$8 million budget increase in fiscal year 2011 for USGS' National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center ( <http://nccw.usgs.gov/> ), the office that handles much of the agency's climate adaptation work. If approved by Congress, the new money will be used to create five regional climate-science centers where USGS scientists will work directly with natural resource managers on climate-change-response strategies.

The first such center is slated to open in April at the University of Alaska in Anchorage. The government will invite bids from institutions or organizations interested in forming climate science centers in the Pacific Northwest and the southeastern part of the United States.

The president also requested \$1 million in additional funding to help USGS develop new partnerships

and train new scientists to work on climate adaptation.

"This is a very broad mission in all our regional centers that's been ramped up over the last two or three years," said Douglas Beard, the National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center's interim chief. "These are on-the-ground

whether or not breeding birds have enough to eat. Another Alaska project is focusing on that. "So if you're managing a critical bird habitat, you might want to put in a refuge to better protect such birds," Beard said.

Another study in the Navajo Nation in the southwestern United States



*Retreating glacier in Alaska.*

projects to address the needs of our partner agencies. We hear a lot from them on adaptation and they're asking for our help."

In one Alaska project, for example, USGS scientists are trying to project how plankton and, in turn, fish will be affected when glaciers that hold fresh water melt and the chemistry of the ocean water changes. This will help management agencies anticipate resource changes and perhaps change fishery rules to address expected increases or declines.

Rising temperatures can also affect what time flowers bloom, and

focuses on the movement of sand dunes, and how this affects plants that people and animals on the Native American reservation in northern Arizona depend on. With the area growing hotter and drier, plants that keep the sand dunes in place have difficulty growing, causing the dunes to shift. This makes it harder for new plants to take root.

"By studying climate change impacts to sand dunes we can identify strategies for keeping sand dunes more stable, we can identify which plants need to be protected, and what kind of plants may tolerate dune mobility enough to be used in

*(Continued on page 20)*



# Pandemic H1N1 Persists as Avian Flu Claims Lives in Three Nations

By Cheryl Pellerin  
Science Writer

**Washington** — A global pandemic is still under way according to the World Health Organization (WHO), 12 months after more than half the population of La Gloria in the Mexican state of Veracruz were sickened by a respiratory disease later identified as type A influenza, subtype H1N1.

And in at least three countries where H1N1 ( <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html> ) is circulating ? Egypt, Indonesia and Vietnam ? highly pathogenic H5N1 ( [http://www.who.int/topics/avian\\_influenza/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/avian_influenza/en/) ) avian flu is infecting poultry and sickening and sometimes killing people who come into close contact with ill or dead birds.

As of February 28, more than 213 countries and territories have reported laboratory-confirmed cases of pandemic H1N1 flu. Millions have been infected and at least 16,455 people have died since the pandemic began in 2009. The illness is generally mild but has been more severe and sometimes deadly for pregnant women, children and young adults, and people of all ages who have chronic diseases.

"An estimated 300 million people or more have been vaccinated against pandemic influenza," Dr. Keiji Fukuda, special adviser on pandemic flu to WHO Director-General Margaret Chan, said February 24, adding that WHO recommends vaccination as a good way to protect against H1N1.

## H1N1 AND H5N1: A COMPOUND THREAT

The latest human H5N1 cases have come from nations where H1N1 is also circulating. On February 12,

tries, scientists fear that the viruses' genetic components could mix, creating a new virus that spreads easily from person to person, as does pandemic H1N1 virus, and that kills nearly 60 percent of the people it infects, as does H5N1.



*Chinese students at a primary school in Jinjiang city in southeast Fujian province wear masks against H1N1 flu.*

the Ministry of Health of Indonesia announced a new case of human infection of H5N1. The infected 25-year-old female from Jakarta province died January 25.

On March 4, the Ministry of Health of Egypt confirmed five new cases of H5N1, with all of the victims reported in critical to stable condition in February. On the same date, the Ministry of Health of Vietnam confirmed three new cases, including one death.

With pandemic H1N1 and highly pathogenic H5N1 circulating among people in some of the same coun-

## WORLDWIDE THREAT CONTINUES

On February 23, an emergency committee of international experts established as part of the International Health Regulations met for the seventh time since the pandemic began to determine if the world is still in the grip of the swine-origin H1N1 virus. The committee studied the situation worldwide.

In the northern temperate zones of the Americas, pandemic flu is circulating at low levels and activity is declining. In the United States, the

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## Pandemic H1N1 Persists as Avian Flu Claims Lives in Three Nations . . .

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that for the week ending February 27, flu activity was relatively low and mostly caused by H1N1. Flu infections are expected to continue for weeks and the nation could experience another wave of flu activity caused by H1N1 or seasonal flu.

Flu levels are back to normal in western Europe, but many eastern European countries (Russia, Bulgaria, Armenia and Moldova) still report higher-than-normal respiratory disease. Pandemic H1N1 is circulating in south and southeast Asian countries. Infections are up in Thailand, and Burma reports regional infections, but infection still is relatively low in both countries.

In East Asia, flu transmission continues at low levels in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and is at normal levels in Japan and South Korea. In Australia and New Zealand, flu infections are low and the island nations of the South Pacific have reported no new H1N1 cases.

Infections are low in North Africa and West Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, where flu surveillance data is limited, several West African countries, including Senegal and Mauritania, report rising numbers of pandemic flu cases. Data from the rest of Africa suggest flu infection levels are low and transmission sporadic.

Because of mixed evidence for declining or low pandemic activity in many countries, new community-



*Rows of chickens at a farm in Long An province in the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam.*

level H1N1 transmission in West Africa, and the Southern Hemisphere's winter months (June, July and August) ? a season that usually promotes flu transmission ? the committee and Chan determined that there has been no change in the pandemic phase ( [http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/phase/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/phase/en/index.html) ), still at the highest level, 6.

### THE WAY FORWARD

On April 19–21, high-level government officials responsible for animal and human health from many nations will meet in Hanoi, Vietnam, to participate in the International Ministerial Conference on Animal and Pandemic Influenza ( <http://www.imcapi-hanoi-2010.org/partners/en/> ), whose theme is "The Way Forward."

This is the seventh international

meeting since 2005 on the topic of pandemic flu, held to advance cooperation among health and agriculture ministers to confront the global threat.

Read more about pandemic H1N1 and H5N1 at America.gov ( [http://www.america.gov/h1n1\\_flu.html](http://www.america.gov/h1n1_flu.html) ) and at pandemicflu.gov ( <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/> ).

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Telling America's story

**U.S. Geological Survey to Help Devise Climate . . .**

*(Continued from page 17)*

revegetation programs," Margaret Hiza, the USGS scientist running the project, explained in a recent podcast.

As U.S. government agencies such as USGS focus more on helping people and animals adapt to climate change, they may face some setbacks along the way. The question going forward, Beard said, is what can — and cannot — be done to help nature adapt to rising temperatures.

USGS, like other government stewards of the United States' natural resources, has a mission to use science to find the best solutions out there. "Everybody's engaged," Beard said.

Other USGS climate adaptation projects under way:

Investigation into how higher temperatures and less precipitation in

arid and semi-arid regions of North America affect wetlands that serve as stopovers for migratory birds.

Study of how temperature changes in streams in the northeastern United States affect the Atlantic salmon population, and projections of future salmon populations in managed fisheries.

Research into how rising sea levels redistribute tidal salt marshes in the San Francisco Bay area. The results of the study will help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plan future land acquisition to protect birds that depend on the marshes.

Learn more about climate change ( [http://www.america.gov/climate\\_resources.html](http://www.america.gov/climate_resources.html) ) at America.gov.

Want to do something about climate change? Join the global conversation on Facebook ( <http://www.facebook.com/ConversationsClimate> ) or share your thoughts below. ♦

**Muslim and Arab Americans Learn Importance of Being Counted. . .**

*(Continued from page 16)*

sus," Beutel said.

Abdul-Malik's remarks during the event further highlighted community participation. Citing examples from the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad that support censuses, he said Muslim Americans need to get involved.

"We ask the minimum number of questions to get the maximum amount of information to help this nation," Abdul-Malik said, stressing the positive uses for census data in strengthening America.

"Maslaha, meaning the common interest, is the Arabic word that should encourage Muslims to be involved in the census," he said. Lutz said the Muslim-American community is responding positively to the 2010 U.S. Census. Partner-

ships are being formed across the nation between the Census Bureau and Muslim-American organizations to ensure that everyone is counted.

AMIN's founder, Hazami Barmada, said she was inspired to participate in promoting the census when she noticed a lack of socio-economic and ethnic diversity at other census-related events. After Barmada contacted the Census Bureau to plan the Muslim Voices Matter event, a census official met her the next day. Just over a week later, the Georgetown University event was held.

"I know you have done some work with the mosques," Barmada recalled telling the Census Bureau, explaining her organization is not religious, but serves as a forum to create understanding among differ-

ent faiths. "But I think it is also really important to work with community organizations that are not religious-based per se."

To advance messages from the event, Barmada said plans are in the works to make a YouTube video. She also hopes her organization will work with the Census Bureau to distribute materials provided at the evening's event to the wider community.

"Hopefully, in dialoguing with them further, I want to see how we can help disseminate these packages to different community groups beyond mosques and community centers," Barmada said.

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